



a million voices for nature

## LICHFIELD RSPB APRIL NEWSLETTER



[www.rspb.org.uk/groups/lichfield/](http://www.rspb.org.uk/groups/lichfield/)

### SPOONIE NEWS

I'm sure most of you will remember the plight of the Spoon-billed Sandpipers which was highlighted in the November newsletter. This tiny wader with a unique spatulate bill is found on the far side of the Asian continent and because of human activity is in danger of becoming extinct. Fewer than 100 pairs have been identified and last year only 12 nests were confirmed at the key breeding site. Five conservation bodies combined efforts to collect eggs, to get them back to Slimbridge and raise the chicks in the hope of maintaining the species. An urgent appeal was made to fund this costly exercise and on the evening of our November meeting we raised £50 which was duly dispatched. My latest magazine from The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust has just arrived and carries an update on the progress of the project.

It's difficult to imagine just how tiny and delicate these chicks are and how careful the care team has to be when handling them. How they reach maturity in the wild is a miracle but of course the survival rate is very low, apparently only four chicks will result from twenty eggs and from those four only one will remain as an adult two years later. No wonder their numbers are in such decline; any disturbance or change of habitat is going to have a severe affect. One of the rescued group has died and as yet cause of death is unknown, a post mortem has revealed no disease and a review of cctv footage has shown nothing unusual.

However the lucky 12 are making progress. They are now moulting into silvery-white adult plumage and amongst their typical juvenile "peeping" is the occasional adult call. They have now been introduced to live food in the form of brine shrimp and their pool is being made more saline as by now they would be living along coastlines.

It's obvious from the WWWT article that the carers for these precious individuals feel an immense responsibility; lets hope all their efforts play some small part in the long-term survival of this species.  
*Information from "Waterlife" WWWT magazine, April/June 2012*

#### LOOKING AHEAD

The programme for next year is now complete and I think we have an interesting and varied set of speakers to look forward to.

Just a taster:-

**January;** Alan Davies and Ruth Miller talk about their world record number of birds seen in a single year in "The Biggest Twitch"

**April;** "An Evening without Bill Oddie!" by Stephen Moss who produced many of Bill Oddie's TV programmes, and is frequently on Radio 4, gives us the lowdown on the world of wildlife filming.

## Strange goings on in the garden

The spell of lovely weather during practically the whole of March had most of us out in the garden, collecting fallen leaves, tidying up the flower beds, giving the lawn its first cut and getting the first row of early potatoes in. It was warm enough to work in shorts much of the time and as I do most of my gardening while kneeling I'm probably the only 60+ year old bloke who has to be told to go and wash his knees before he can go out. However working at eye-level with the daffodils does have its advantages. You see a lot more down there, you notice the new shoots coming through, you soon spot the aphids massing for an attack on tender growth and having your hands down among the foliage reveals the dark damp dives loved by slugs and snails. It's always good to see plenty of insect life early in the season as it will provide essential food for returning migrants and the young of early nesters. Earlier in the year while it was still cold I'd noticed clusters of ladybirds in sheltered corners on trees and fence panels and as soon as it warmed up there were thousands of them active in the garden. However they were not potential bird food.

Like many others in the insect kingdom they have evolved a brightly-coloured appearance as a warning that they taste unpleasant; this is achieved by releasing a bitter-tasting alkaloid from their leg joints (of all places!) However this reaction, known as reflex bleeding, uses lots of energy and during the winter when ladybirds don't feed they can't afford to use this defence so it is thought that by gathering in large numbers a stronger "don't eat" signal is given to predators.

Why some insects have developed effective defence strategies such as this while others provide tasty titbits is another of nature's many mysteries but without doubt there'll be a reason.

## RSPB Pin Collecting

Did you realise that the humble little wildlife pin that we are all familiar with has its own collectors club which has its own club badge? Apparently there is a thriving group of collectors who seek out the rarer and discontinued badges to add to their collection. I imagined that the readily available badges were a standard item apart from the obvious difference in the subject and had little monetary value. A conversation with one of the ladies who works at Bromley Hayes Garden Center where we have one of our collecting boxes, soon put me right. She has a collection of over 250 and has paid £50 for a single badge!

What I hadn't realised is that the style of badges and their backing cards has changed over the years and that limited editions are issued for specific events, sites, projects and reserves. There are also badges issued to support appeals both home and abroad and the current total of collectable badges is about 350. The scheme began in 1997 with the issue of just 4 badges - Bittern, Puffin, Red Kite and Bullfinch - their immediate popularity resulted in more designs being released as their fund-raising potential was recognised and the sale of pins is now a major source of income.

If you're tempted to become a collector you can purchase a beautifully made wooden display cabinet for between £140 and £235 and if you join the RSPB Pin Badge Collectors Group you will be kept informed of new and forthcoming issues. It's not the same as being out with your bins but it's all for a good cause and a gift of one to a youngster may start a lifelong interest in wildlife and the environment.

**DON'T FORGET;DON'T FORGET;DON'T FORGET;DON'T FORGET  
GET TO KNOW YOUR BIRDS**

BRANSTON WATER PARK: SUNDAY APRIL 15th; 9.30

*Bring along a friend, the grandchildren, granny, your neighbour, the couple from next door etc!*